



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ON HOBBIES.

I WAS lately led to reflect on the multitude of Hobbies, of different colours, sizes, and ages, on which human beings travel through the world, and by which their journey is rendered more varied and pleasing than it would otherwise be. Since the days of Tristram Shandy, every one understands what is meant by a Hobby. It is neither a racer nor a hunter, but a kind of donkey, kept for private gratification; sometimes, moreover, a wild and foolish—sometimes, an awkward, raw-boned, and useless beast; though not unfrequently a well-trimmed, thorough-paced, and serviceable little animal. To descend from tropes and figures:—the name has been given, by universal consent, to some trifling, harmless, half-silly, half-useless propensity, which, under numerous forms, occupies, in a smaller or greater degree, a very considerable portion of the thoughts and minutes of every human being capable of mental or bodily action. High and low, rich and poor, wise and foolish, gentle and simple, all indulge in an occasional ride; some more openly, and others rather in disguise; some every day, and others perhaps but once a year. Some Hobbies are like hacks—common to a multitude; and others, like fine Arabians, are kept with great care by individuals, entirely for their own use. The antiquarian, the mineralogist, the entomologist, and a host of others, are all mounted men. Why, I myself, when penning this very paper, am riding a Hobby. Nay, Mr. Editor, do you not sometimes take a sedate ride yourself—to the printing-office, for example—with bundles of papers peeping out of your pockets, on the contents of which you are meditating with visible complacency, and rejoicing in the anticipation of the pleasures they shall yet impart to the reading public? The whole of authorship, in fact, is nothing more than a huge hobby chase, in which, contrary to the saying of the wise king, the race is sometimes to the swift, and the battle to the strong, and the riches to the men of understanding. How differently are they mounted from those who collect specimens from the mineralogical kingdom, whom it would certainly be no untruth to call the heavy horse! Nor is this company very limited in number, or remarkable for discrimination. After their rides, they sometimes form cabinets, which Mr. M'Adam, the road-projector, would probably take at a fair valuation. Other riders of this class trot on in a different way. They collect nothing: but they dream and speculate on the formation of the world, and other mysteries of geological science. I have heard an hour's lecture from one

of them, on the proofs that this globe of ours has reached its present bulk from a pippin of comparative magnitude, and that the earth is still growing as fast as a fungus, swelling out on all sides like a huge white cabbage.—But your antiquary is the most persevering rider. Though he should see his auditor yawning with impatience, he never ceases; but goes on, in technical and measured phrase, to show the birth, history, and adventures of a piece of rude, clipped, battered silver, which he holds between his fingers. He tells its age to a day, and its value to a farthing; boasting that there are only two in the world of the same kind, and that Pinkerton has marked it “very, very rare.” His is a very jolting kind of a hobby; perpetually making false steps, and falling into holes, from the uneven and uncertain ways which it thinks fit to travel. Yet I have a mighty fondness for the thing. It ambles away among old helmets, and spears, and coins—such heart-stirring and thought-inspiring objects, that I pity the man who is not moved by them.

The conchologist, though he will probably tell you that all antiquaries are mere madmen, when he sets out on his ride, is yet loaded with his shells, which he rattles and displays with great complacency; bidding you observe how beautiful they all appear in his little repository, although you might like them better in snuff-boxes.—The entomologist, again, loads his patient donkey with cases full of dried reptiles, sans life, sans eyes, sans bowels, sans every thing; none of them seeming to have died suddenly of the dropsy, or any other uncomely swelling. Though these dead bodies might give rise to as many reflections as Yorick’s skull,—yet, maggots, reptiles, crawlers, and creepers, I hate you! But what shall I say of your bird-stuffers, that make mummies of foreign fowl, for their private amusement—of your bird-fanciers and florists, as well as your lovers of cats and dogs—or of your gatherers of old china, and your collectors of books old and new, and manuscripts that have escaped the wreck of decayed houses, and the edge of the trunk-maker’s shears? You also meet, on their rides, crowds of genealogists, that desire nothing half so much as to explore the history of their neighbour’s progenitors; and half-mad fellows that will leave the loom to compose rhymeless songs and ballads, the livelong day. You find a great many people, again, extremely fond of making little bits of useless machinery. There is a perpetual whizzing of small wheels in their houses, as in a Lilliputian cotton-manufactory; and a reel in a bottle generally ornaments the fire-place, along with two or three examples of the perpetual motion, which, unfortunately for the world, the children had stopped but a very few days ago. These

Hobbies, though at first small, sometimes acquire the magnitude and strength of a horse; and it is not right to despise the most silly and magnificent of the group.

Many of these are, what might be called, domestic *Hobbies*. But there is perhaps a greater number fit for the field. Some ride out upon them to shoot or hunt, nearly the half of their time; or go to horse-racing, cock-fighting, or the fancy, in all its varieties. Others, again, will ride out far from home, to hang over a stream for entire days, with "a stick and a string;" having, as Dr. Johnson said, "a worm at one end, and a fool at the other." I am almost ashamed to mention the name of the most contemplative and entertaining of all the brothers of the angle, whose words have been so much quoted and explained of late. Yet I find it utterly impossible to think of fishing, and not have "honest Izaak Walton" uppermost in my thoughts. No man ever rode a Hobby with such enthusiasm. He was a perfect knight-errant; and, though of the most amiable and benevolent disposition, his ardour was so great that he instructs his pupil, with the utmost composure, in the proper method of performing as barbarous and and cruel an operation as was ever conducted. He teaches him how to use a frog in angling; and minutely describes the particular part of the living creature's body, in which it is necessary to insert the arming-wire; observing that it should then be brought up the small of his back, and drawn out somewhere near the throat; and concluding with this most humane advice—"And in all this, use him as though you loved him;"—a notable way, truly, of displaying love and kindness! Now, this was, in fact, riding a Hobby to death. But it is probable that all genuine Hobby-horsical men are of this cast—they regard nothing; but jog on after their own fancies, or pleasures, or employments, through all the accidents of time and place.—Many persons make religion a Hobby; but many more employ their leisure, and more than their leisure, on political schemes and speculations. There is not so impertinent and intrusive a fellow in the world, as he who is mounted on the great stalking-horse of politics. Would you see him in grand style? Observe him coming out of the news-room, after chewing the cud, for eight hours, over the latest news from the Continent;—observe the importance of his looks, the hurry of his steps, and the impatient glances which he casts around to discover some poor wight on whom to discharge the immensity and profundity of his political wisdom. Avoid him, good reader! as if he had the plague: he will overwhelm you with wars and rumours of wars; the rise and fall of stocks, in which *he* has probably no interest; and with distant dangers which may affect your pos-

tery in the fifth generation, but in which most certainly *you* have no concern.

But the marvel of the thing is, to observe the countless number of these little ambling propensities, and how much each man despises that of his neighbour. There are hundreds of old citizens that will sit for hours over their gin, and agree most amicably on speculations, funds, bank bills, and other matters of trade and finance; but it is very curious to observe the employments to which they betake themselves, in their leisure moments. One will perhaps be found collecting newspapers; another making little chemical experiments; and a third be seen coming out of the market, with a boot-jack protruding from between the skirts of his coat, or a rat-trap sticking in his waistcoat pocket, to add to his stock of lumber. There is not one of them that does not occasionally discover some little curious propensities—and why should he not? Has not the most curious compound of a man that ever wrote a book, even Laurence Sterne himself, averred, in round and positive terms, that the wisest men in all ages have had their Hobby-horses like ourselves? We may certainly go farther than “poor Yorick,” and find not only the wisest men given to these things, but the lowest and poorest, both in pocket and intellect, the very idiots and beggarmen, having “their coins or their cockle-shells, their maggots or their butterflies.” The very mendicants of this age have their Hobbies. Reader! have you ever seen a beggarman—a real, true, thorough-bred beggarman—none of your greasy, shabby, sickly-looking town paupers; but a stout old fellow, with a mountain of blankets round his person—of a sunburnt, copper-coloured visage, having a little dog to direct him, if he should happen to be blind, how to eschew the dangers arising from water-pails, projecting rocks, the unknown depths of ditches and puddles, and the other numerous ills blind beggarmen are heir to; with a half-pint tin fastened at his bosom, to receive the offerings of pious Christians, being far too wise to run the chance of catching cold by holding his hat in his hand, as some boobies do? Have you ever observed the number of wallets that hang in front and rear of such a figure as this? In one of these, you will find a bag of buttons, which show his propensity. I have seen a person of this description possessed (to make a loose guess) of several thousands. He had buttons of stone, wood, leather, brass, copper, bone, and bell metal—he had them black, white, yellow, green, and every other shade and colour under the sun;—he had buttons round, buttons oblong, buttons thick, and buttons thin. He called them his trinkets—his jewels; and would as soon have lost his life as his buttons. He rode his Hobby

with as much ardour as Izaak Walton; and I have known at least twenty beggarmen furnished in a similar manner. Buttons are as common among them, indeed, as coins among antiquaries. Yet this is only one example out of a thousand. The Hobbies of these happy mortals are "as various as the roads they take in journeying through life."—Even madmen are not without their Hobbies. I have met with a great many, whose intellectual powers were suspended, mounted like their neighbours. Thus, the sole delight of one poor idiot is in collecting old hats. I have seen him, on fine sunny days, with more than twenty on his head, forming a tremulous column, the centre of gravity of which it required very careful balancing to preserve. It would be impossible to discover what first prompted this "motley fool" to so strange a pursuit; though I have no doubt that he experienced as much pleasure in brushing his hats at night by the fireside, or strutting about during the day with this diadem of old felt nodding on his brow, as the most enthusiastic antiquary in collecting and examining the relics of past ages. Another madman receives infinite gratification from gathering sticks. Nothing of this kind comes wrong to him, from the Jemmy-ratan up to the Irish shillelagh. He has more than would suffice the parish for a cudgel match: he has stolen many hundreds in his time—he has grubbed up whole plantations—he has left entire hedges naked—and pulled away, without remorse, the support from many a flourishing young ash, or oak sapling. There never was an idiot born that had not some little Hobby to lighten his pilgrimage on earth. How very miserable, indeed, would such poor creatures be, if they had not! They derive great and durable enjoyment from their Hobbies; and Gough himself received no more.

By two-headed Janus!
Nature hath framed strange fellows in her time.

And it is entirely in riding their Hobbies, say I, that these same strange fellows have their strangeness unfolded. We are all strange fellows, if that will do us any good—both the wise and the foolish, the gentle and the simple, as I before asserted, and still continue to believe: so, let us jog on cheerily together, keeping a respectful distance from each others' Hobbies, taking care not to ride down either friends or foes; and may all have a merry, a pleasant, and prosperous journey!

B—.